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THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE SETTLEMENT OF THE TOWN OF

NEW MILFORD, CONN.

June 17th, 1907.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

DANIEL DAVENPORT,
Of Bridgeport, Conn.

Press of
The Buckingham, Brewer & Platt Co.
Bridgeport, Conn.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT NEW MILFORD, CONN., JUNE 17TH, 1907,
BY DANIEL DAVENPORT OF BRIDGEPORT, CONN.,
ON THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE SETTLEMENT OF THE TOWN.

The settlement of New Milford began in 1707, exactly a century after that of Jamestown, Va. At that time, although Milford and Stratford at the mouth of the Housatonic had been settled almost seventy years, and the river afforded a convenient highway into the interior, for much of the distance, this place, only thirty miles from the north shore of Long Island Sound, was still beyond the extreme northwestern frontier of New England, and indeed of English North America.

The inhabitants of Connecticut then numbered about fifteen thousand, settled in thirty towns, mostly along the shore of Long Island Sound, and upon the banks of the Connecticut and Thames Rivers. During the thirty years next before, a few families from Norwalk had settled at Danbury, from Stratford at Woodbury, from Milford at Derby, and from Farmington at Waterbury. With these exceptions, hardly more than pin points upon the map, and a few settlements about Albany, N. Y., the whole of western and northwestern Connecticut and of western Massachusetts and northern New York was a savage wilderness, covered with dense forests, and affording almost perfect concealment for the operations of savage warfare.

Though the northwestern portion of Connecticut was then a most formidable and inhospitable wilderness, strenuous efforts were already being put forth by the Colony to encourage its settlement. For, strange as it seems to us now, at that time, owing to imperfect modes of cultivation and the difficulty of subduing the wilderness, the settled portions of the Commonwealth had begun to feel overpopulated. Twenty-five years before, the Secretary of the Colony had reported to the Home Government, that "in this mountainous, rocky

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and swampy province" most of the arable land was taken up, and the remainder was hardly worth tillage

This need of more land, and the protection from invasion which the settlement of this section would afford the communities near the coast, and the innate love of adventure and desire to subdue the wilderness which have characterized the American people from the beginning, were the impelling causes which led to the planting of New Milford.

So pressing did this movement become that, though what is now Litchfield County was then as remote and inaccessible to the rest of the Colony, as were Indiana and Illinois to our fathers in the middle of the last century, within forty-five years after the first settler had built his log cabin and lighted his fire here, twelve towns had been settled and the county organized with a population of more than ten thousand.

In order that we may appreciate, somewhat, the broader political conditions under which the first settlers took up their abode here, which largely engrossed their thoughts and vitally affected them and their children for two generations, it is necessary, before taking up the narrative of their actual settlement here, to advert briefly to the state of affairs at that time in England, and on the continent of Europe, and in the English, French and Spanish Colonies of North America.

By 1707, it had become apparent to the people of Connecticut that, soon or late, they must fight for the very existence of their chartered privileges and natural rights, not alone the British Crown, but the English people. The disposition of the people of England to reap where they had not sown had become very clear. In April, 1701, Connecticut was named in the bill then introduced in Parliament to abrogate all American charters. She resisted with all her might through her agent, but it passed the second reading, and would have become a law but for the breaking out of the French War. Its principle was supported by the mercantile interests and the great men of England. Then for the first time the people of Connecticut fully realized that their foes were to be, not the exiled house of Stuart, but the English people themselves, and that though they changed their dynasties they did not change their own nature.

In 1707, the principal kingdoms of Europe and their colonies were ablaze with war. Anne was Queen of England.

In that very year she attached her signature to that long projected and most important constitutional arrangement, the Act of Union between England and Scotland, which made them one kingdom, the crown of which, by the Act of Settlement passed a few years before, had been forever vested in the person and heirs of Sophia, the electress of Hanover, the present reigning dynasty. Anne's accession to the throne in 1702 had been followed by the acknowledgement, by Louis XIV, of the son of James II, the deposed and fugitive king of England and the determined foe of the rights of the Colonists, as the rightful king, although in the Treaty of Ryswick, in 1697, he had solemnly stipulated to the contrary. This act of perfidy roused the English to fury. The primary cause of the war, then raging, was the acceptance by Louis of the crown of Spain for his grandson Philip despite a previous formal renunciation. But the immediate occasion was his espousal of the cause of the son of James II as pretender to the British throne, which enabled the English Government to form a great European alliance to wrest Spain from Philip and prevent Louis from becoming the absolute master of Europe.

The year before, 1706, had witnessed the humbling of the pride and ambition of Louis by the defeat of his armies, at Ramillies by the Duke of Marlborough, in Piedmont by Prince Eugene, and in Spain by Lord Galway. Charles XII of Sweden had advanced to Dresden in Saxony, an English and Portuguese army had occupied Madrid, and an attack of the combined fleets of Spain and France upon Charlestown, S. C., then claimed by Spain as a part of Florida, had been repulsed by the vigor and martial skill of the Colonial authorities.

At that time, the valley of the St. Lawrence was occupied by about fifty thousand French settlers, imbued with bitter hostility towards the settlers in New England and New York. Already the vast design of LaSalle to acquire for the King of France the whole interior of the Continent seemed to have been accomplished. While as yet the English were struggling to secure a foothold upon the Atlantic seaboard, the French had explored the Mississippi and its tributaries to its mouth, and the whole vast region drained by them, between the Alleghanies and the Rockies, had been taken possession of by the French under the name of Louisiana, and a chain of military and trading posts from New Orleans to the St. Lawrence, ad-

mirably chosen for the purpose, had been established to hold it, and another chain was already planned to extend southward along the west side of the Alleghanies, to forever keep out the English. The French had been for fifty years hounding on the numerous tribes of Canada and northern New England to attack and exterminate the settlers of New England. The conquest of Canada by the English was therefore an object of the greatest political importance, and necessary for the peace and safety of the colonies, and their future growth, and it continued to engross the efforts and exhaust the means of the colonists, until their purpose was finally accomplished in 1763.

The people who settled here were entirely familiar with the hardships, dangers and horrors of Indian warfare to which they were liable in taking up their abode on this frontier. The horrible incidents which attended the massacre of the inhabitants of Schenectady, in 1690, seventeen years before, during the previous war, and of the inhabitants of Deerfield, Mass., and other places in 1704, during the war still raging, were household words throughout Connecticut, and had left an abiding imprint in the minds of the people on the border. Though the Indians, right about them here, seem to have been few in number and comparatively harmless, they knew from their own and their fathers' experience, that their position was one of extreme danger, and that at all times their scanty and hardwon possessions and their lives were liable to instant destruction, from unheralded irruptions by the more distant Indian tribes of the North and Northwest, urged on by their French instigators and allies. For the experience of the last seventy years, from the time of the Pequot War, and during the subsequent troubles with the tribes in southwestern Connecticut, and on Long Island, and during King Philip's War, had fully taught them the craft, treachery and pitiless cruelty of the savages, as well as their capacity for extensive combination among widely separated tribes.

When Major DeRouville, in 1704, with his band of civilized and uncivilized savages, committed the atrocities at Deerfield, Mass., the suspicion of the Colonists that the French had instigated the former Indian outrages became a certainty, for in this instance they openly shared in them. Their object was, as I have said, to drive the English Colonists from North

America, and substitute in their place their own colonial system. For this purpose they fitted out hundreds of parties of savages to proceed to other portions of the English settlements, shoot down the settlers when at work at their crops, seize their wives and children, load them with packs of plunder from their own homes, and drive them before them into the wilderness. When no longer able to stagger under their burdens, they were murdered, and their scalps torn off, and exhibited to their masters, and for such trophies bounties were paid. The French government in Paris paid bounties for the scalps of women and children, as Connecticut did for those of wolves, and it not only fitted out other savage expeditions, but sent its own soldiers to assist in the murderous work. Detailed reports of each case were regularly made to the government at Paris by its agents in Canada which can now be read. This is true of every French and Indian war until 1763, and the fact was as well known to the settlers here in 1707, as it is to the historical investigator of to-day.

In the beginning of 1707, reports of an expedition by the French and Indians against some part of New England gave alarm to the Colony, and on the 6th of February of that year a council of war was convened at Hartford, consisting of the Governor, most of the Council, and many of the chief military officers of the colony. Suspicions were entertained that the attack would fall upon western Connecticut, and that the Indians in this vicinity intended to join the French and Indians. The Council of War determined that the then western frontier towns, Danbury, Woodbury, Waterbury and Simsbury, should be fortified with the utmost expedition. They were directed to keep scouts of faithful men to range the forests to discover the designs of the enemy, and give intelligence should they make their appearance near the frontier. At the October session in 1708, it was enacted that garrisons should be kept at those towns, and so it continued until after the close of the war in 1713.

It was in the midst of alarms and dangers such as these that the settlement of this town was begun. One of the first houses constructed here had palisades about it to serve as a fort, which lasted many years, and in 1717 soldiers were stationed here for the protection of the inhabitants, and this was repeated several times afterwards. Every man was a

soldier. He was a soldier when he sat at his meals, a soldier when he stood in his door, a soldier when he went to the cornfield, a soldier by day and by night.

At the time the first settlers arrived here there was a tract of cleared land on the west side of the river called the Indian Field. It extended from where the river runs in an easterly direction south to the mouth of the little brook which runs along Fort Hill. It was not included in the original purchase from the Indians, having been reserved by them in their deed. It was, however, purchased from them in 1705, by John Mitchell, and was conveyed by him to the inhabitants of the town in 1714. This was of the greatest advantage to the first settlers. It furnished them a space of cleared ground, where each planter could at once plant his corn and other crops, without the delay of felling the trees.

It is thought also that the ground where we now stand, and Aspetuck Hill had been in a large measure cleared of trees by the Indians by burning, as was also Grassy Hill, two miles east of here. There appears also to have been some meadow land partially cleared at the mouth of the Aspetuck River.

At that time the country about here presented no such appearance as it does now. The river then flowed with a fuller tide. With the exceptions I have noted, a continuous forest overspread the whole landscape. No thickets, however, choked up the ways through it, for the underbrush was swept away every year by fires built by the Indians for that purpose. Winding footways led here and there which the Indians and wild beasts followed. The roots of the smaller grasses were destroyed by this annual burning over. A coarse long grass grew along the low banks of the river and wherever the ground was not thickly shaded by trees. After the occupation of the country by the white settlers this annual burning was prohibited. In lieu thereof, the General Court early in its history enacted that every inhabitant, with a few exceptions, should devote a certain time yearly, in the several plantations, to the cutting of brush and small trees in the more open forests for the purpose of allowing grass to grow in such places, as during the summer the cattle ranged through the forests near the plantations subsisting on what grew there. It is said that in the early settlement of this town, all meadow

land was secured by clearing marshy or swampy ground and allowing it to grow up with grass from the roots and seeds already in the soil. It was one of the early difficulties in the Colony to secure grass, from want of grass seed.

The forests about here abounded with bears, wolves, foxes and catamounts, deer and moose, wild turkeys, pigeons, quail and partridges, and the waters with wild geese, ducks, herons and cranes. The river itself was alive with fish and every spring great quantities of shad and lamprey eels ascended it. Strawberries, blackberries and huckleberries were extremely abundant in their season.

The winters were usually of great severity. In 1637 the snow lay on the ground three feet deep all over New England from the third of November until the 23rd of March and on the 23rd of April it snowed for several hours in Boston, the flakes being as large as shillings. The springs were very backward, the summers extremely hot and often dry.

Upon the petition of the people in Milford, in May, 1702, the General Assembly granted them liberty to purchase from the Indians a township at Wyantonock, the Indian name of this place, and directed them to report their doings to the Assembly. The next March they made an extensive purchase of the natives, and a patent for the same was granted by the Assembly. In October, 1704, the Legislature enacted that the tract so purchased should be a township by the name of New Milford, and that it must be settled in five years,—the town plat to be fixed by a committee appointed by the General Assembly. In October, 1706, the Legislature annexed the tract to New Haven County. In April, 1706, the first meeting of the proprietors was held at Milford, and it was voted that the town plat and home lots should be speedily pitched and laid out by the committee appointed by the Legislature, according to its own best judgment, following certain rules laid down by the proprietors. During that year and according to those rules, the town plat was laid out.

It was originally intended to lay out the settlement on the hill immediately east of the present village, from this circumstance called Town Hill to this day. In point of fact, it was laid out on Aspetuck Hill, and consisted of the town street and sixteen home lots. The street was twenty rods wide. It began at the south end of the brow of the hill, or at the lower

end of what was then called the "Plain on the Hill" and extended northward. Eight lots were laid out on each side of this street, each lot being twenty-one rods wide and sixty deep.

By the rules adopted by the proprietors, these lots were to be taken up successively in regular order by the settlers as they should arrive. John Noble took the first lot on the east side of the street at the lower end, he being the first settler to arrive. John Bostwick took the lot on the opposite side of the street, he being the next settler on the ground. This method was followed by others until there were twelve settlers with their families, numbering seventy souls located on this street in 1712. Of these twelve families, four were from Northampton and Westfield, Mass., four were from Stratford, two from Farmington, and only two from Milford. In 1714, the town street was extended southward to the south end of the present public green.

The first houses constructed here by the settlers were of the rudest description. They were built of logs fastened by notching at the corners. They were usually from fifteen to eighteen feet square, and about seven feet in height, or high enough for a tall man to enter. At first they had no floors. The fireplace was erected at one end by making a back of stones laid in mud and not in mortar, and a hole was left in the bark or slab roof for the escape of the smoke. A chimney of sticks plastered with mud, was afterwards erected in this opening. A space, of width suitable for a door, was cut in one side and this was closed, at first, by hanging in it a blanket, and afterwards by a door made from split planks and hung on wooden hinges. This door was fastened by a wooden latch on the inside, which could be raised from the outside by a string. When the string was pulled in the door was effectually fastened. A hole was cut in each side of the house to let in light, and, as glass was difficult to obtain, greased paper was used to keep out the storms and cold of Autumn and Winter. Holes were bored at the proper height in the logs at one corner of the room, and into these ends of poles were fitted the opposite ends, where they crossed, being supported by a crotch or a block of the proper height. Across these poles others were laid, and these were covered by a thick mattress of hemlock boughs, over which blankets were spread. On

such beds as these the first inhabitants of this town slept and their first children were born. For want of chairs, rude seats were made with axe and auger by boring holes and inserting legs in planks split from basswood logs, hewn smooth on one side. Tables were made in the same way, and after a time, the floor, a bare space being left about the fireplace instead of a hearthstone.

No sooner had the first settlers taken up their abode here than they were called upon to defend the title to their lands in the courts of the Colony. About thirty-seven years before, the General Court had granted permission to certain Stratford parties to buy land from the Indians and settle a plantation at this place, and they had bought over twenty-six thousand acres hereabouts. Apparently, however, no attempt was made towards a settlement of the same until after the purchase of same tract from the Indians by the Milford parties in 1702, and the grant for a patent for the same to them by the General Court in 1703. Soon after the settlers first broke ground here in 1707, a suit was begun against them by the Stratford people in the County Court at New Haven in May, 1708, and it was carried thence to the General Court. It was tried sixteen times. The first fifteen times, the plaintiffs won on the strength of their Indian title. The sixteenth, the defendants won on the strength of their Indian title, the patent from the General Court, and occupation. This incident is particularly interesting because one of the plaintiffs and the lawyer in this great case was the famous John Read, one of the ablest men and most remarkable characters which New England has produced. Some notice of him will not be inappropriate here, as he was one of the earliest inhabitants of this place.

He was born at Fairfield, June 29th, 1679, and was a brother-in-law of Governor Talcott. He graduated at Harvard in 1697, became a minister, preached in Woodbury as a candidate, and in various towns in Hartford and Fairfield Counties and preached the first sermon ever delivered in this place. He studied law, and when in 1708 the General Assembly first provided for the appointment of attorneys as officers of the Court, he was one of the first admitted. He held the offices of Colony Queen's Attorney, 1712-16, Deputy for Norwalk, 1715-17, Commissioner to settle the boundary with New York 1719, and he was Connecticut's representative in the

Inter-Colonial Commission in regard to Bills of Credit, in 1720. He removed to Boston in 1722, and became the Attorney General and a member of the Council of Massachusetts. He was by far the most eminent lawyer in New England, and was called "the Pride of the Bar, Light of the Law, and Chief among the Wise, Witty and Eloquent." It was he who prepared the instructions to Lord Mansfield, the counsel for Connecticut in the great case of Clark vs. Tousey, in which was discussed the question whether the Common Law of England had any force in Connecticut other than as it was adopted by the people of Connecticut. His exposition of the principles involved was most masterly, and it was the great authority upon which in a later generation the people of Connecticut relied to sustain them in their opposition to the measures of the crown in 1775.

In a centenary sermon delivered at Danbury in January, 1801, the Rev. Thomas Robbins had this to say of him, "One of the early inhabitants of Danbury was John Read, a man of great talents and thoroughly skilled in the knowledge and practice of the law. He possessed naturally many peculiarities and affected still more. He is known to this day through the country by many singular anecdotes and characteristics under the appellation of 'John Read, the Lawyer.'"

In 1712, the town was incorporated, which gave it the power to tax the inhabitants to support a minister, and the place became thereby an ecclesiastical society. In March, 1712, the Rev. Daniel Boardman was called to preach to the settlers. In May, 1715, the settlers petitioned the General Assembly that they might obtain liberty for the settlement of the worship and ordinances of God among them, and the Legislature granted them liberty to embody in church estate as soon as God in his providence should make way therefor. On November 21st, 1716, Mr. Boardman was duly ordained as the pastor of the church of Christ in New Milford, the total number of inhabitants of the town then being one hundred and twenty-five. The first vote of the town to build a meeting house was passed in 1716, but work was not commenced upon it until 1719, and it was not completed until 1731, after infinite struggling. It was forty feet long, thirty wide and twenty feet in height between joints and was provided with galleries, pews and a pulpit. Long before completion, when it was first

used for religious purposes, the congregation was accustomed to sit upon its outer sills, which were able to accommodate every man, woman and child in the town with a little squeezing. In 1713, the town voted to build for the minister a dwelling house forty feet long, twenty-one wide, two stories high, and fourteen feet between joints. In 1726, thirteen years later, the house was still unfinished. The first Sabbath day house was not built until 1745.

In 1721, when there were but thirty-five families residing here, a public school was ordered by the town to be kept for four months the winter following, one-half of the expense to be borne by the town. The children were taught reading, spelling after a phonetic fashion, writing, and the first four rules of arithmetic. In 1725, it was voted to build a schoolhouse twenty feet long, sixteen feet wide, and seven feet between the joints.

The first settlers crossed the Housatonic to their lands on the west side by fording it at a point near the mouth of Rocky River, about a mile above the settlement, or at Waunnupee Island in times of very low water. In 1720 the town built a boat for the purpose, which was used until 1737 when the first bridge ever built across the Housatonic from its source to its mouth was constructed at what is now the foot of Bennett Street.

The settlers for many years crushed their grain by hand in mortars or carried it to mill at Danbury, Woodbury, or Derby, and brought back the flour and meal. In 1717, John Griswold, under an arrangement with the town, built a grist and sawmill on Still River, at what is now Lanesville.

It is said that in 1713, there was but one clothier in the colony. The most that he could do was to full the cloth which was made in the homes. A great proportion of it was worn without shearing or pressing. He lived at Woodbury, and thither the early inhabitants of this town resorted to have their cloth fulled. People, to a very large extent, wore clothing made from the skins of animals. They also wore wooden shoes and moccasins, or went barefoot, although leather boots and shoes were sometimes used.

The implements which they used in subduing the wilderness, their axes, saws, plows, hoes and scythes were of the rudest description. Their horses, cattle, sheep and swine we

should now regard as of very inferior quality. The same was true of the few vegetables they cultivated, and of their fruits, especially their apples. Turnips, squashes and beans were the principal vegetables. Potatoes were not as yet cultivated in New England, onions were not generally, and tomatoes were looked upon as poisonous. Some of them owned negro slaves but worked the harder themselves to make them work.

They had little or no currency, taxes and debts being paid in produce. What they ate, what they wore, what they coaxed from the reluctant soil of these hillsides, cost them infinite labor. As was to be expected, a stingy avarice was their besetting sin, which manifested itself in all the relations of life. They were without newspapers, none being published in the Colony until 1755. They had few books, the first printing press in the Colony not having been set up in New London until 1709. They suffered greatly from malaria and other forms of sickness, as did all the early settlers in the State. Medical treatment was poor and difficult to obtain. The women went to the limit in childbearing, and the burden of rearing their large families was awful. The art of cooking was little understood. They had no stoves or table forks. The food was served in a very unsavory fashion, and was very indigestible. The people therefore had frightful dreams, and dyspepsia was very prevalent. No carpet was seen here for a hundred years after the settlement. Communication with the outer world was slow, difficult and rare. On several occasions, owing to the failure of their crops and the difficulty in getting relief from distant places little better off, they nearly starved to death.

Truly the task which they had undertaken to subdue this wilderness, to plant here the civil, religious and educational institutions of Connecticut, and to prepare this beautiful heritage for their children and children's children, was no holiday pastime, no gainful speculation, no romantic adventure. It was grim, persistent, weary toil and danger, continued through many years, with the wolf at the door and the savage in the neighboring thicket.

Beside the physical evils with which they were beset, they had spiritual troubles also. They fully believed in witchcraft as did all their contemporaries, in a personal devil who was busily plotting the ruin of their souls, in an everlasting hell of

literal fire and brimstone, and in a Divine election, by which most of them had been irrevocably doomed from before the creation of the world to eternal perdition, from which nothing which they could do, or were willing to do, could help to rescue them. The great object of life to them, therefore, was to try to find out what their future state would be. Said one of their preachers, "It is tough work and a wonderful hard matter to be saved. 'Tis a thousand to one, if ever thou be one of that small number whom God hath picked out to escape this wrath to come." That we may get a touch of reality from those far off days, let me quote you a few lines from the saintly Thomas Hooker, the founder of Connecticut, and long the model for her preachers. "Suppose any soul here present were to behold the damned in hell, and if the Lord should give thee a peephole into hell, that thou didst see the horror of those damned souls, and thy heart begins to shake in consideration thereof; then propound this to thy own heart, what pains the damned in hell do endure for sin, and thy heart will shake and quake at it. The least sin that thou didst ever commit, though thou makest a light matter of it, is a greater evil than the pains of the damned in hell, setting aside their sins. All the torments in hell are not so great an evil as the least sin is; men begin to shrink at this, and loathe to go down to hell and be in endless torment."

The only test they were taught to apply to ascertain whether they were predestined to suffer or escape this fearful doom, was in their ability and willingness to conform their wills to the will of God as revealed in the Bible. Accordingly as they had succeeded in this, they had a reasonable assurance as to their fate, although no wile of the devil was more frequent than to falsely persuade men that their prospects were favorable. To study the scriptures day and night to ascertain the will of God, and to struggle without ceasing to conform their wills to his as therein revealed, was therefore the great object of existence for them, not that they could thereby alter in the least their future state, but that they might, if possible, find out what it was likely to be.

Should this recital of their beliefs provoke a smile, our amusement will soon be checked by the thought of the little progress which has been made in the last two hundred years, towards solving the same problem. The origin of evil, the

ineradicable tendency of the human heart to sin and do evil, the mournful spectacle of ruin and desolation in the moral world, and the future life are the same inscrutable mysteries to us as to them. If we have constructed or adopted a more comfortable theology, it is probably because we are less logical than they. It is perhaps because we have forgotten or refused to look at some things at which they did not blink.

Then, too, the Lord was abroad in those days. Their thoughts were deeply tinged by the semi-pagan views with which the authors of both the Old and New Testaments were imbued. When the thunder crashed, it was the voice of an angry God that spoke. When the lightning flashed, it was the gleam of His angry eye. Benjamin Franklin was then but a year old, and electricity had not become the packhorse of the world. The smiles and frowns of nature in all her varying moods through all the days and seasons, which we ascribe to the operations of law, were to them the visible tokens of the wrath or favor of the Almighty. On December 11th, 1719, for the first time in the history of the Colony, the northern lights were seen here. They shone with the greatest brilliancy. The consternation they caused was fearful. The people had never heard of such a phenomenon. They considered it the opening scene of the day of judgment. All amusements were given up, all business was forsaken, and sleep itself was interrupted for days. Again, on the 29th of October, 1727, a mighty earthquake occurred, which shook with tremendous violence the whole Atlantic seaboard. The people here believed that the Lord was about to swallow them up in His fierce anger. The women throughout New England immediately discontinued the wearing of hoop skirts then recently come into fashion, believing that the earthquake was the sign of the Lord's displeasure at the sinful innovation.

Hardly had the first settlers here begun to build permanent homes for the living, when they were called upon to provide resting places for the dead. The first person to be buried in yonder burying ground was a child, a girl, Mary, the daughter of Benjamin Bostwick. The next was John Noble, the first settler, and the first Town Clerk. He died August 17th, 1714. The town formally laid out the burying ground in 1716. Within fifty years three hundred had gone to rest there.

There were no religious exercises at the funerals, neither singing, praying, preaching, or reading of the scriptures. This was by way of revolt from former superstitious practices. The friends gathered, condoled with the afflicted ones, sat around a while and then the corpse was taken to the burying ground. After that the party returned to the house of the deceased, where much eating and drinking was indulged in, and if the weather permitted, outdoor games and horse races were in order. The next Sabbath an appropriate funeral sermon was preached. A bereaved husband or wife usually soon married again.

The meeting house was never heated, but the people, summoned by drum beat, attended it every Sabbath, morning and afternoon, even in the severest weather, although no Sabbath day house was erected here until 1745.

The sacramental bread often froze upon the communion plate, as did the ink in the minister's study. The people worked their minister very hard, as was the case in all early New England communities. They went to church not so much because they had to as because they wanted to. Church-going was their principal recreation. They demanded long prayers and two long sermons each Sabbath from their minister, usually on doctrinal points, which they acutely criticised. Services began at nine o'clock in the forenoon, and continued until five in the afternoon with an hour's intermission. Soldiers, fully armed, were always in attendance throughout the services ready to repel any attack upon the settlement.

It should be added, however, that with all their strictness in Sabbath keeping and catechising, in family and church discipline, there was great license in those days in speech and manner, much hard drinking, and rude merrymaking, due to their rough form of living. They were not what they wanted to be, nor what a loyal posterity perhaps longs to believe them. They had red blood in their veins. They were among the most enterprising men of their generation. They were backwoodsmen, the vanguard of that wonderful race which in two hundred years pushed westward the frontier from this place to the Pacific, fighting with man and beast the whole way, and sowed the land with vigorous sons and daughters.

The congregational singing in those days must have been an interesting performance. When the first settlers came to

New England from the old country, they brought with them a few tunes to which they sang all the psalms and hymns. The proper mode of rendering these was through the nose. With the lapse of time and the advent of a new generation, these tunes became jangled together in inextricable confusion. The practice was for a deacon as leader to read a line of the psalm or hymn, and the congregation sang at it as best they could, each one using such tune as he chose, and often sliding from one tune to another in the same line or improvising as he went on. Finally, in 1721, the Rev. Thomas Walter of Roxbury, Mass., published a treatise, upon the grounds or rules of music or an introduction to the art of singing by rote, containing twenty-four tunes harmonized into three parts. The attempt to supersede the old Puritan tunes and restrict the liberty of the individual singers met with the greatest opposition and was long successfully resisted in all the churches in New England, so tenacious were they of the rights of the individual singer. It caused great dissension in the church at this place. Finally, in February, 1740, the church voted to half the time for the next year, singing the old way one Sabbath and the new way the next, and in 1741, at a meeting specially called to settle the matter, it was voted thirty to sixteen to sing thereafter after the new way.

No musical instruments were allowed in the meeting-house. They had never seen or heard a church organ. But they knew that their fathers likened its sound to the bellowing of a bull, the grunting of a pig, and the barking of a dog, and had resisted its use in religious services even to the shedding of blood. Nor were flowers allowed in the church.

In those days in New England women were not thought to have minds worth educating, and they were brought up in extreme illiteracy. Nevertheless, their natural wit, brightness, and good sense made them very agreeable companions of the superior sex. And their influence over their husbands, sons and brothers, was quite as great as that of their more cultivated daughters of the present day. The refining, educating, stimulating influence of the women had much to do in withstanding the tendency back to barbarism, which life in an isolated and new community led to. The debt which is owed to them is incalculable.

As the descendants of those people assemble here to-day

after the lapse of two hundred years, to commemorate their work and rejoice in all the strength, beauty and order, now smiling around us in peace and plenty, which have grown out of what they began, and as we look back upon their condition, trials and experiences, we are apt to imagine that their lot, contrasted with our own, was an unhappy one. Nothing could be further from the truth. They were a brave, hardy, thrifty, frugal, industrious and most capable people. Man for man and woman for woman, they were probably superior to those here to-day in faculty, and in the capacity for healthy enjoyments. Their whole previous lives had inured them to their experiences. They were the sons and grandsons of the original pioneers of New England, and they had been born and reared in rude settlements. They never indulged the delusion that this region was a land flowing with milk and honey. Before they came they knew that they were to wrest their living from an uncongenial soil, to struggle with penury and to conquer only by constant toil and self-denying thrift. The forest would supply them with the materials for shelter and fuel and to some extent with food and clothing. All the rest must depend upon their own exertions. There was a pleasure in facing and overcoming the perils and difficulties which they encountered, which those, more delicately reared who now live here can never know. Their individual helplessness in the face of appalling obstacles to be met, but bound them closer together in mutual helpfulness. Accordingly we find that their social faculties were highly developed. It may well be doubted whether the sum total of human pleasure among the whole five thousand inhabitants of the town to-day is any greater than it was among the few hundred who settled it. Probably our own superabundance of good things has actually lessened our capacity to enjoy, in comparison with theirs. Their simple tastes and homely joys amid their rude surroundings were probably more productive of positive pleasure and real happiness, than all the refinement and culture of our twentieth century civilization.

It would be a pleasing and instructive task to trace the progress of this old town, from those rude beginnings to its present strength and wealth. But the limits of the time and subject allotted to me on this occasion forbid. It is the product of the labors of eight generations, who now sleep

beneath its soil. They never could have foreseen the present. They never knew or thought of us. Each generation was busy with its own problems, tasks and experiences. As we look back upon them our hearts are filled with gratitude for the results of their work. A clean blooded, land-loving thrifty race, through their activities they escaped from the poverty of their beginnings and attained unto an almost ideal abundance of the primal needs of civilization. Their physical condition became probably as good as that of any other village community in the world. Their experiences stimulated their intellectual life into full activity, and they bore their full share in the wonderful work which Connecticut has done in the world. In all critical times in both State and Nation, the sons of New Milford, both native and adopted, have been very active and influential and one of them, Roger Sherman, performed a work which will last as long as this nation shall continue to be free and independent or as long as the Constitution of the United States shall endure.

We know that the past two hundred years are but the beginning of a long history of this town. We believe that as the years roll by, at the close of each century of its life, the events of this day will be repeated here. What will be the lot of those who stand here, one, two, three and four hundred years hence, to recall the origin and history of this town, we cannot conceive. Our hope is that it will be as peaceful, as prosperous, and as contented, as our own.

Whatever it shall be, we expect that their desire to know what can be known of that long vanished world, in which both present and future have their roots, will lead them to examine the memorial of what is said and done here to-day. We are not more sure that the Housatonic will then be flowing than that they will share with us in affectionate interest in what has gone before.

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